

Marion's Christmas Fund

By Eliza Strang Baird.

On a warm afternoon late in April, Marion Dexter walked slowly home from school, swinging a heavy bag full of books and pondering over a problem which weighed heavily upon her mind.

"If I could only earn twenty-five dollars before next Christmas what a good time I could have, and what lots of pleasure I might give everyone for whom I care!" she said to herself. Then she sighed deeply, seeing no prospect of accomplishing any such result or obtaining so large a sum.

Christmas was the greatest event in Marion's year, and she spent weeks and months planning and contriving her presents.

But she had never yet been able to do all she wished for others, or to carry out the ideals in her mind concerning her gifts.

"Last year," she soliloquized, "I earned eight dollars by embroidering collars and cuffs and making cookies. But it was not nearly enough, and there are such lots of things I would love to do this year.

"Let me see! I want to give father a beautiful foot-rest like Dr. Brown's and mother some really handsome lace curtains for the parlor in place of the old darned and shabby ones.

"Then, I want a velvet cushion for grandmother's chair, a lot of nice toys for the children, something pretty for each one of my school friends, and a few things for my poor families. Oh, I want so much more than I can ever get, I know!

"If I could only think up some new scheme for earning the money! I shall certainly not ask father for a cent this year.

"In such bad times as these he will find it difficult to buy Christmas presents for such a big family of children, and to keep us in the clothes we need, besides all our other heavy expenses."

As Marion arrived at this point in her monologue, she reached her own front gate, and stopped to look at the little garden plot in front of the house, of which she was very fond, and which owed its existence almost wholly to her care and labor.

Many of the perennial plants were already beginning to make a good showing, a few tulips and hyacinths, the bulbs of which had been given her the preceding fall, were in flower, and a little clump of daffodils in one corner made a bright spot of gold.

"I must put in my cosmos and marigold seeds tomorrow afternoon, if possible," thought Marion, "and there is quite a little transplanting to be done, too, amongst the chrysanthemums and phloxes—they have come up so unevenly."

Just at this moment, she looked up, and noticed that her next door neighbor, Mrs. Trenton, was standing on the other side of the hedge, surveying her own garden, which was much larger and better kept than that of the Dexter's.

"Oh, Marion, how do you do this afternoon?" said the lady. "Isn't it lovely that spring has really arrived

again and that we can work at our flowers? I wish you would come over here a moment, for I want to consult you about changing the position of these delphiniums and spireas."

Marion was very fond of Mrs. Fenton and was indebted to her kindness for many plants and cuttings, which had beautified her own little plot of ground. They were soon deep in consultation over their common topic of interest.

After a while Mrs. Fenton remarked, "You know what trials I had with that boy who worked for me last summer, Marion. It seemed almost impossible to teach him anything. He could not learn to distinguish with any certainty weeds from plants, and pulled up some of my choicest possessions. When he sowed seed, he might either bury it two inches deep or leave it nearly all on the surface of the ground. He wants to come again this year, but I dread to engage him.

You don't know of a really bright boy whom I could hire for the summer months, after the garden has been well dug up and started by a man, do you, Marion?"

"No, Mrs. Fenton, but I know a girl who would gladly help you, if you would care to give her a trial!" replied Marion, for a sudden thought had leaped that moment into her brain.

Perhaps there might be a chance that in this way she could earn part of the fund for Christmas!

She spoke timidly, and her face flushed crimson, for she feared Mrs. Fenton would think her foolish and disapprove of her plan.

With considerable trepidation, she unfolded her idea, and told her friend how very anxious she was to earn some Christmas money, and how dearly she would love to work among the beautiful flowers for that purpose.

"It would be lovely for me to have you, Marion!" Mrs. Fenton exclaimed, when she comprehended what the young girl desired, "But do you think you would be equal to several hours of work each day through the summer? Of course, it would not be such very hard labor, because I always have a man once in two weeks to do any rough spading or digging which may be necessary, as well as to drive in the high poles for the cosmos and dahlias, but it must be constant and painstaking.

"I know you would be faithful, Marion, dear, if you really undertook it, but I should hate dreadfully to spoil your vacation or to take away from any of your good times with the other boys and girls!"

"Don't worry for a moment about that, Mrs. Fenton!" Marion cried, "The work will not be hard for me, I know, because I love flowers so dearly, and I am very strong and well. I think that I could easily manage to give you three hours a day—say, two in the early morning and one late in the afternoon, if that would be enough, and if you would pay me just what you did the boy last year."